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Untitled

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February 23, 1989

Ms. Joni Hezlep, Director
National Atomic Museum
Department of Energy
Albuquerque Operations Office
P.O. Box 5400
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87115

Dear Ms. Hezlep:

In response to your request for memorabilia associated with 509th Composite Group activities for display in the National Atomic Museum, the writer has none; however, this letter may provide intrinsic and philosophical (if I may) pertinence far more intriguing than things. Such an endeavor entails, in part, taking issue with a titan of many sophisticated fields, Mr. Robert McCormick Adams: educator, archaeologist, world traveler, curator and presently Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

For many years, I, among many, have pondered the enigma of the B-29 bomber that carried the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima, the *Enola Gay*, a historical artifact that has never been assigned its proper place in public exhibit. Mr. Adams deals with this matter in his commentary, *Smithsonian Horizons*, in the July 1988 issue of the *Smithsonian*, to which most of the offering that follows is directed.

I

Mr. Adams quotes Alfred Kazin (*New York Times Book Review*):

The bomb was inscribed with autographs and derisive messages to the Emperor of Japan, some of them obscene. But for all the fun and games, the fearful power, terror, hopes and delusions released by *Little Boy* (The Bomb) changed everyone, forever . . . forty-three years later we are still struggling . . . with every effect and implication of that change . . .

Obviously, Secretary Adams shares with Mr. Kazin his naive and demeaning implicitation toward GI-simulated levity. When American celebrities were peddling kisses in countless measure (another affront) to eighteen-year old kids to enlist and go fight the “dirty Japs” (a veritable crime it was at that time to ascribe to the despised enemy the name Japanese), when American citizens were being hawked to buy War Bonds for ships and tanks and planes with which to sink the “dirty slant-eyes,” it was considered both macho and patriotic to defile the foe with every derogation imaginable, and the leaders of this trend were the media, happily encouraged by Washington. In many restaurants and bars across the country, restroom urinals were “decorated” at their foci with garish cartoons of the faces of Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito.

That is how the United States, its allies, and our collective citizenry then beheld the evil Axis.

II

Near the conclusion of his commentary, Mr. Adams writes:

An indissoluble part of an exhibit of the *Enola Gay* should be some account of what happened at Hiroshima — then and afterward. Probably the somewhat doubtful overall effectiveness of earlier and subsequent non-nuclear bombing — in Germany during World War II, and in Vietnam — also should be looked at, to provide a comparative perspective.

On February 13, 1945, the RAF and the USAF combined air strength numbering 1,111 heavy bombers in a series of raids on Dresden, Germany, a virtually non-military target bulging with thousands of refugees who had poured in from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia. The sorties continued for some sixteen hours, and the number of souls roasted to death by fire-bombs in “the horror of Dresden” is, by British count, “vague.” Four American sources of authority were consulted: two estimate the deaths at 35,000, and two, one of which is the *Historical Encyclopedia of World War II*, affirm a total of 135,000. Applying an average of the four sources results in a net figure of 85,000, or 14,000 more humans than were incinerated at Hiroshima. Many war historians regard Dresden as “the Hiroshima of Europe.”

Secretary Adams, in an unsolicited role of quasi-apologist, continues:

Save for Col. Paul W. Tibbets, the plane’s pilot, they (the crew) knew little of their bombload until the last moments. Even he, along with all American experts, expected merely an immensely powerful blast.

(It is suggested in this instance that “merely” and “immensely” are totally incompatible.)

At Dresden, as well as other European devastations, bombs designed by the English weapons expert, Barnes Willis, weighing 12,000 pounds (Tallboys) were used, and 22,000-pounders (Grand Slams) were ready to roll off the production line had the European air war continued beyond March, 1945.

Colonel Paul W. Tibbets, Jr., was more than “the plane’s pilot.” He was commander of the 509th Composite Group, and he knew as much about the bomb’s potential as did Professor Robert Oppenheimer or Navy Captain William “Deak” Parsons, perhaps the most powerful person in the entire Manhattan Project and “guest” crew member on the *Enola Gay*. It was Parsons who supervised the en-route arming of the bomb, and it was also he, who, in the pre-mission briefing, told the crew:

The bomb you are going to drop is something new in the history of warfare. It is the most destructive weapon ever produced. We think it will knock out almost everything within a three-mile area.

One may infer from Mr. Adams' apologetic view that twenty-mile effectiveness, instead of just three-mile effectiveness, by *Little Boy*, may well have discouraged participation by some of the crew in a mission in which personal involvement was no longer, if ever, an option.

Secretary Adams' premise is to show why the *Enola Gay*, after 39 years of availability, is still, without malice, not on full-time exhibit under auspices of the Smithsonian Institution, proffering such deterring obstacles as space and budget, while overtly denying any private or politically-influenced decision to not place the aircraft on public exhibit. He does promise that the *Enola Gay* will be exhibited.

III

When Paul W. Tibbets' mother was born, her parents, because their beloved infant seemed "so all alone," christened her Enola (alone, backwards) Gay. That such a gentle name should be, in typical American GI bravura, emblazoned on the sides of the then most terrifying juggernaut in history, and alone indeed, while delivering the most enormous cargo of all time, comprises real life dramatic irony that reduces those endless fictional coincidences of *A Tale of Two Cities*, no matter how ingeniously ideated, to prosaic peanuts. It must be pointed out, however, that Tibbets, a quiet man who demanded impeccable efficiency while scorning trivia, was, for a time, like General George S. Patton, a pure warrior, and thus, in his patriotic intellect, it was a just and noble act that the revered name of his mother should grace the fuselage of that lethal superweapon he rode over the homeland of the despised enemy, and for which he was appropriately decorated with the Silver Star.

As of today, Mr. Paul W. Tibbets, Jr., has received more hate mail than perhaps any other person in military history, yet, given the essence of moral law, which bows to intent over results, whom should we prefer to salute, Paul Tibbets, or Kurt Waldheim? The Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, with all their horror, saved an estimated one-million military lives, and certainly a great many civilians.

IV

During the nineteen-fifties and sixties, the U.S. Military conducted certain nuclear bomb tests in Nevada and on Eniwetok and other Bikini

Islands before large numbers of American service people, most of whom were “assured” there would be no after-effects. Many of them stated later that, during the shockwaves of enormous X-ray power, they could see, through closed eyes, the bones of their hands and forearms. The dire results of Agent Orange in Vietnam need no elaboration. Over 300,000 military-related claims against the United States, for causation of malignant and potentially terminal afflictions to service people and offsprings, remain in government files, while but few have been fairly settled.

V

Today, the Japanese hold title to hundreds of billions of dollars in “American” real estate, applaudable testimony to their individual and collective industry, intelligence and foresight, and a sad commentary on American short-sightedness, indolence, greed and dishonesty, at both the corporate and government levels. Various trade and travel organizations offer us literature on how to get along with the Japanese, including “glossaries” of courtesies and civilities we should afford them. Our tacit apologies seem endless.

As of this very writing the body of Emperor Hirohito lies in state, awaiting final respects from the greatest entourage of dignitaries in history, including our own Commander in Chief. When President Bush was queried by the media as to why the traditional diplomacy of dispatching the Vice President, or the Secretary of State, to state funerals was in this case not implemented, he emphatically replied, “Oh, this is too important!”

Let us hope Mr. Bush is aware of the chilling fact that Japan, the world’s soaring technological superpower, can easily expand its mind-boggling “chip” technology into weaponry.

America is going to really have to scramble to become a nation of education.

We’re getting whopped with our own culture.

Arthur R. Hanson
Staff Sergeant (erst)
320th Troop Carrier Squadron
509th Composite Group